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ABSTRACT

The research evidence for selecting students in higher education with and without regard to race and sex is examined to assist admissions officers in light of the 1978 Bakke decision, which seems to give schools the option to use race in admissions decisions. Three clusters of studies supporting the consideration of race-sex subgroups in admissions decisions are considered: (1) those showing no relationship, or perhaps a negative relationship between the traditional predictors and college grades for minority students; (2) those indicating the need for separate equations or cutoffs for each subgroup if traditional predictors are employed; and (3) those involving the utility of noncognitive or nontraditional variables in predicting minority student success. Proponents of using a single prediction equation or cutoff score suggest that this approach is most fair to all concerned. Proponents of using separate equations or cutoffs for each subgroup when traditional predictors are employed note that black males tend to be the least predictable race-sex subgroup and any general equation would discriminate most against them. One reason for considering noncognitive or nontraditional variables in predicting minority student success is to ensure having comparable information for minority and majority group college applicants. Some research has indicated that the typical minority applicant is not as sure what is being solicited and is less likely to know how to supply the information the college wants. It is concluded that strong consideration should be given to race-sex subgroups in admissions procedures. (SW)

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THE AFTERMATH OF BAKKE: SHOULD WE USE RACE IN ADMISSIONS?

William E. Sedlacek

Research Report # 19-79

Paper presented at Council on Legal Educational Opportunities (CLEO) Conference, Washington, D.C., October 6, 1978.

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INSTITUTE ON DESEGREGATION

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COOPERATIVE PROJECT

This paper has been identified by a joint project of The Institute on Desegregation at North Carolina Central University and ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at George Washington University. The purposes of this project are to identify, collect, and make available literature concerned with

(1) the problems of minority students in higher education in general and
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New published and unpublished materials are reviewed and recommended by participants of the Institute on Desegratation's Interinstitutional Research Group (ID/IRG) for acquisition by ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education. An annual bibliography of this material will be published under the names of ERIC and the Institute.

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THE AFTERMATH OF BAKKE: SHOULD WE USE RACE IN ADMISSIONS?

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Summary

The research evidence for selecting students in higher education with and without regard to race and sex is presented and discussed. The writer concludes that the weight of evidence favors a strong consideration of race-sex subgroups in admissions procedures based on three clusters of studies: (1) Those that show no relationship, or perhaps a negative relationship between the traditional predictors and college grades for minority students; (2) If traditional predictors are employed there must be separate equations or cutoffs for each race-sex subgroup; (3) The utility of noncognitive or nontraditional variables in predicting minority student success. Legal implications and suggestions for future research are included.

One thing the Bakke decision of 1978 seems to do is give schools the option to use race in admissions decisions. There is clearly no mandate to do so; only the opportunity. What advice, then, can one give an admissions officer or committee? Should race be considered? And if so, how should it be used? In this article I will attempt to answer this question based on available research by considering the cases for and against using race in admissions and then reaching a conclusion.

The Case for Selecting Students Without Regard to Race

A number of studies have shown that one can employ traditional selection devices such as standardized test scores (e.g., ACT, SAT), high school grades, and high school rank without regard to the race of the students being selected (e.g., Baggaley, 1974; Humphreys, 1973; Schmidt, Berner and Hunter, 1973; Stanley, 1971; Temp, 1971; Thomas and Stanley, 1969).

Stanley (1971), in summarizing the research on predicting the success of "disadvantaged" students, concluded that admission to selective colleges and universities should be based substantially on test scores and high school grades, regardless of whether the applicant is from a minority racial, ethnic, or sociological group. Stanley felt pessimistic about the possibility of remediation for disadvantaged students, and stated, "An admissions officer ignores test scores at his institution's peril," (1971, p. 642).

Humphreys (1973) concluded that most studies that seemingly find differential validity for racial groups contain erroneous statistical logic. The faulty logic is of two types: (1) correlations or regressions for different racial groups should be compared to each other and not tested as significantly different from zero; (2) because the minority group samples are often much smaller than those of the majority group, we demand a larger coefficient to achieve significance for the minority group. This makes it appear that we

have significance for the majority students but not for the minority students.

Thus, a single prediction equation or cutoff score is most fair to all concerned and will select the best students for a given school. Is is particularly important that higher education select the best possible students during the current times of tight budgets, declining enrollments, and a skeptical public. Bad decisions now could severly damage or wreck higher education completely.

The Case for Selecting Students by Race

There appear to be a growing number of studies which indicate we cannot use a single equation or selection system for all students (e.g., Baggaley, 1974; Borgen, 1972; Farver, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1975; Goldman, 1973; Horowitz, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1972; Perry, 1972; Pfeifer and Sedlacek, 1970, 1971, 1974; Sedlacek and Brooks, 1975; Temp, 1971). The support for this position centers around three clusters of results. First, there are studies which show no relationship, or perhaps a negative relationship between traditional predictors and college grades. Sedlacek and Brooks (1975) found that the SAT-Verbal scale had correlated significantly with freshman grades (.56) for black females and was uncorrelated for black males (-.03) in a special program at the University of Maryland, while the SAT-Math scale correlated .16 for black females and -.33 for black males. Thus the SAT-Math scale actually had negative validity for black males in that sample. Baggaley (1974) found essentially the same results with blacks at the University of Pennsylvania. The SAT-Verbal correlated .15 with grades for black females and -.04 for black males; while the SAT-Math correlated .38 for black females and -.36 for black males.

The second cluster of studies supporting differential race-sex subgroup prediction involves studies which show that if traditional predictors are to

be used, there must be separate equations or cutoffs for each subgroup to achieve optimum validity. Horowitz et al. (1972), Perry (1972), Pfeifer and Sedlacek (1971), and Temp (1971) all clearly show this. Goldman (1973) presented evidence that even when a general regression equation overpredicts how well minorities will do, it is still unfair to them. He argues that since we have less ability to accurately predict minority student grades (higher standard error of estimate), if we combine race-sex groups and develop a single regression equation we will achieve an equation favoring the more predictable majority applicants. Even if we obtain an overestimate of minority student grades, it will not be offset by the use of a relatively inaccurate equation. Interestingly, white females tend to be the most predictable race-sex subgroup and any general equation would favor them. That we don't have a great many more white females in higher education is evidence that admissions officers have not been reluctant to balance classes with white males. Black males tend to be the least predictable race-sex subgroup and any general equation would discriminate most against them.

Studies by Farver et al. (1975) and Horowitz et al. (1972) further support the proposition of differential regression equations for race-sex subgroups. They found that if grades beyond the freshman year are predicted, different equations results. Not only are the regression equations different over the years, but blacks become relatively more predictable than whites after the freshman year. Thus, race-sex subgroup equations predicting beyond the freshman year appear particularly appropriate. Studies by Berdie and Prestwood (1975) and Kallingal (1971) further support this conclusion.

The third major cluster of studies supporting the consideration of race-sex subgroups in admissions deals with non-cognitive predictors of minority student success. A key argument in minority admissions which I have not seen

adequately raised previously runs like this: One reason why we must consider race or ethnic group in admission is to achieve equality. It is often argued that you don't, or can't, achieve equality by considering differences. I say that the kind of equality we are after in admissions is equality of information, not equality of process. We want the best information we can get on every applicant. It can be argued that our current system of gathering applicant data favors white, middle class applicants. How? Let's start with the application form itself. Studies have shown that the typical minority applicant is not as sure just what is being asked, and is less likely to know just how to "play the game" and supply the information the school really wants (Sedlacek, Merritt and Brooks, 1975). Minority persons also are less likely to have family, friends or peers who have dealt with the admissions process who can advise them.

Minority students may be reluctant or tenative in completing the application form, and universities that have done the best job of increasing black enrollment over a five-year period have tended to streamline or reduce the number and types of forms required in their admissions procedures (Sedlacek, Merritt and Brooks, 1975). Thus the application form is designed to elicit information fairly efficiently on applicants with traditional, white, middle-class experiences in the society. It can be documented that the experiences and life styles of typical minority applicants are different (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976; Borgen, 1970), and that we would gather data differently if we were to design a form specifically to admit minorities. For instance, a minority applicant who has shown leadership in a community project rather than the biology club might not be as likely to write it on the application because of the way the question is worded and his/her lack of information on what is

appropriate to write in.

Aside from the application form, we must consider that the typical tests employed in education are not as useful in predicting or diagnosing minority student potential performance as they are in predicting middle class, white student performance, as was discussed above.

How did this happen? The best explanation appears to me to be that the reinforcement system developed in the society for minority people is more capricious than it is on the average for whites. That is, there is not as tight a link between performance and outcome for minorities as there is for whites (Sedlacek and Brooks, 1976). There are a number of studies that show that minorities do not tend to have the same control over their lives as do whites (Gurin et al., 1969; Epps, 1969). More whites realize that if they do X, they will get Y, and so forth. For example, whites are more likely to feel "If I study hard, I will get good grades and go on to the next step." This is not nearly as clear for minorities. Several studies show that teachers tend to have lower expectations for minority student performance (Rosenthal and Jacobson, 1968; Rubovits and Maehr, 1973). This is more likely to result in higher or lower grades than would be expected, either of which are bad for minorities trying to develop a link or relationship between what they do and what happens to them. This kind of grade discrepancy has been found in a number of studies (Cleary, 1968; Thomas and Stanley, 1969; Pfeifer and Sedlacek, 1971), and helps to explain why grades don't predict minority student performance better. It is particularly difficult to diagnose or predict minority male performance. Some sociological literature supports the argument that the majority culture tends to control minority culture primarily through controlling males (Verma and Bagley, 1975).

Since this link of behavior and reinforcement is better and stronger for white applicants, we don't have to work too hard to obtain additional applicant information on whites. If a white in a white oriented system, using white culturally based predictors, gets high grades, we know something about the motivation of that student. If he/she were president of a fraternity/sorority, we know that shows leadership. But for minority applicants, we are not as sure about their cultures, what it is like to be in them, and how one shows accomplishment in those cultures. Astin (1975), in a national study of dropouts, found that blacks who were able to demonstrate knowledge gained in non-traditional ways through credit-by-examination were less likely to drop out than blacks who did not take credity-by-examination. The increase in student retention associated with showing knowledge in this nontraditional way was more than twice as great for blacks as for whites.

Sedlacek and Webster (1978) found that schools that tended to consider race related variables tended to have better retention of minority students. They also found that private universities tended to have better retention records than public universities.

A number of studies have shown that background, interest, attitudinal and motivational variables are related to minority student success, but are not necessarily useful in predicting the academic success of white students (e.g., DiCesare, Sedlacek and Brooks, 1972; Gurin et al., 1969; Horowitz et al., 1972; Lowman and Spuck, 1975; Perry, 1972; Pfeifer and Sedlacek, 1970, 1974; and Sedlacek and Brooks, 1975).

Sedlacek and Brooks (1976), in reviewing the noncognitive predictor studies for minorities, concluded that there were seven key noncognitive variables: (1) Positive self-concept. Confidence, strong "self" feeling, strength of character, determination, independence. (2) Understands and deals with racism.

Realist, based on personal experiences of racism. Committed to fighting to improve existing system. Not submissive to existing wrongs, or hateful of society, or a "cop-out." Able to handle racist system. Asserts that the school has a role in fighting racism. (3) Realistic self-appraisal. Recognizes and accepts any academic or background deficiences and works hard at self-development. (4) Prefers long-range goals to short-term or immediate needs. Understands and is willing to accept deferred gratification. (5) Availability of strong support person. Has a person of strong influence available to provide advice. (6) Successful leadership experience. Has shown the ability to organize and influence others within one's cultural/racial contexts. (7) Demonstrated community service. Has shown evidence of contribution to his/her community.

All of the above variables can be assessed by practical means through interviews, counseling sessions, standardized measures, questionnaires or application forms and can be obtained by counselors and personnel workers. Thus the process of gathering such information should be able to fit into existing programs without involving significant costs. Many administrators and educators are concerned with the implications of any minority admissions policies for possible "reverse discrimination" lawsuits such as the Bakke case. The use of the above noncognitive variables has been recommended by the Association of American Medical Colleges as a way to achieve equality and be prepared for possible lawsuits (D'Costa, et al., 1974; Prieto, et al., 1978; Association of American Medical Colleges, 1976, 1977). The basis of most reverse discrimination lawsuits has been a white applicant accusing a school of preferential admission based on race or ethnic group. If a school were to employ a systematic minority admissions procedure based on empirical studies which showed the procedure to be valid, it would be in a good position to avoid lawsuits.

It should be noted that I am not suggesting that the seven noncognitive variables are not important for white applicants. I am suggesting that the way

we go about gathering our admissions information favors white applicants, and we tend to get noncognitive information routinely for them. In admissions and retention, our immediate goal is equality of information to use in making decisions and planning programs. If we must work harder, or use different methods, to secure information from some applications, so be it; our long term goal is retaining and graduating competent professionals.

Conclusions

It appears to me that the weight of the evidence favors a strong consideration of race-sex subgroups in admissions procedures. While the evidence is not always exact in terms of how to weight the variables, particularly the noncognitive predictors, there is much support for the aforementioned conclusion. Because of our inability to weight the predictors, it is all the more important that local research be conducted at each school. The studies noted above can serve as guidelines, but the specifics should be developed by the admitting institution.

There are a great many issues relating to minority admissions which will not be discussed here. Those interested are referred to Sedlacek (1974, a,b; 1977, a,b) and Hixson & Epps (1975), for further information. There is one issue, however, which is especially important when attempting to summarize and evaluate the research in this area. We must remember that the very nature of our information gathering and research methods, and our tendency to be conservative in interpreting results, work against the minority applicant. Our application forms, interviews, letters of recommendation, tests, and the educational system itself were designed for majority people. By having relatively few applicants providing scanty information from atypical backgrounds, it is easy to fall back upon the old standards in admission research, and explain results in terms of "flukes"

or methodological problems. It is a time when we must drop a notch or two in our model of inductive science and be willing to piece together some more fragile and misunderstood bits of information. If we do not, we could be risking the future of entire races of people. Recent evidence indicates that the numbers and percentages of minorities in higher education are dropping (Sedlacek and Pelham, 1976). Whether this trend continues will depend largely upon the actions of admission officers and any conclusions we can reach from our research.

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